



THE *Theology vol. 33.*
CASE
OF THE
MINISTERS
Ejected at EXON.

By JAMES PEIRCE, one of them.



R. JOSEPH HALLET and I being well known in *Exon*, there is no need to say any thing of our character; nor is it intended in this paper to give a large account of the difference and dispute which has been among the Dissenters of late; such a one may be expected in some time. All that is now design'd is to acquaint the people, and the world, with the last part of the procedure in ejecting us, and to appeal to the consciences of all, whether we have been justly dealt with.

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MR. *Hallet* has been settled among them above these 30 Years; and I was above 5 years ago chosen by the three congregations, *nemine contradicente*; whose choice was seconded by the desire of the whole assembly that meets here; and I was brought from a most loving people, who made me a handsom allowance.

OUR Labours were well accepted, until there arose a controversy about the explication of the doctrine of the TRINITY; in raising which we had not either of us the least hand. We both endeavour'd to still it when it was begun, and made a Noise; but were not able to do it. There is no formal charge brought against either of us as to our morals, nor any fault found with us, but with relation to this one point.

THE Gentlemen who used to manage the temporal affairs of the congregations, were pleased, some time ago, to send for seven ministers in the country, and desire their advice. These were the reverend persons following— Messrs. *Ball* of *Honiton*, *Horsbam* of *Topsham*, *Hall* and *Moore* of *Tiverton*, *Walrond* of *Ottery*, *Evelcigh* of *Crediton*, and *Manston* of *Lymfen*. None of the ejected ministers side were advised with, or knew any thing of their being sent for, till they came, being Men pick'd out as fit for the purpose. Had an equal number been chosen on both sides, some good might have been expected. But these ministers, who were really parties in the controversy, pursued no designs of peace. The paper of advice which they drew up, was not drawn up after a hearing of us, nor was it communicated by them to us, but accidentally fell into our hands while they were scattering it about the country in a circular letter. Nay, tho' I insisted upon it to three of them, that they should give no advice relating to me, without first hearing what I had to say; yet did they never give us a hearing.

WE thought they had no more right to draw up Tests for us, than we had for them; and leave it to God and the world to judge, whether they have acted a christian and brotherly part in what they have done against us.

Wednesday, March the 4th, they came hither the second time; and the next day the four ministers were desir'd to meet the Gentlemen; which accordingly they

they did. Then the paper the seven had drawn up and subscrib'd, was read to us, which shall hereafter be publish'd at large. It consisted of three articles, the second of which was what we were urged with, and was this: *That the denying the true and proper Divinity of the Son of God, viz. that he is one God with the Father, is an error of that nature* [that is, an error that is a sufficient foundation for the people to withdraw from the communion of their ministers holding it] *contrary to the doctrine of the holy scriptures, and the common faith of the reformed churches.*

THEN was it put to us, whether we own'd that *the Son of God was one God with the Father?* I urged them not to be hasty, telling them, There were heads of advice under the consideration of the whole body of the *London* ministers, which were shortly expected, and might be a means of healing us. They answer'd, They had nothing to do with them; nor would they wait for them; those advices not being the advices of the Presbyterian Ministers; but the addition of the Anabaptists to one side made a majority: tho' I am since inform'd they were divided, as well as the other denominations, ten on one side and nine on the other. I desir'd that we might have time to give our answer; but was told we must do it presently. Mr. H. told them, He heard there was in the Press a Book written by four eminent Ministers in *London*, and desired we might see whether that, which was shortly expected, would satisfy us. Nothing of this nature avail'd. There was no attempt made to charge us with denying the true and proper Divinity of the Son of God, even in the sense of the article; so that we had not fair dealing in that respect. For here was nothing laid to our charge, supported by witneses; but an Inquisition was as truly set up, to rack our consciences, and search out the secret sense of our minds, as ever there was any in *Spain* or *Portugal*. I challeng'd them thus: 'Gentlemen, Is there any single expression you can any of you charge me with using, either in praying or preaching, that has been disagreeable to the scriptures? No one offering to alledge any, I added: 'Then, Gentlemen, I take you to record, that you have no such to accuse me of.' To which I was

answer'd by one of them: *Stop there! we don't say so.* Then said, 'I desire to know what it is, that I may clear my self.' All the answer to which was, That they did not come prepar'd for that. I can't but think this usage to have been disingenuous. To deal thus with a man, is to wound his reputation, without giving him room to vindicate himself, let him be ever so innocent; which is the worst sort of calumniating.

I THEN told them, as to their article, I would own that *Christ and the Father were one*, because he said so. They ask'd, if I would own they were one God? I answer'd, If they would turn me to the text where 'twas said so, I would own it: But I had over and over declar'd, I would subscribe no religious tests at all that were not express'd in Scripture words: that if they made it a religious test, that *three and two make five*, I would refuse to subscribe it. And I gave this as my reason for my stiffness; That I verily believ'd, that the worst mischief had been done to the Church of God by imposing unscriptural creeds or tests upon men; and that now God had stirr'd up a noble spirit in men in vvhom we little expected it, to plead against impositions; and therefore I could not in conscience tamely give up the liberty they vvere so bravely defending. They said, Then they had my answer. Mr. *Hallet* then next refused in like manner to give his assent. Then Mr. *John Lavington*, who had had as great a hand in kindling the flame as any man, roundly gave his assent. And Mr. *Wubers*, in the last place, offer'd them this explanation, taken out of of Bp. *Pearson*, 'Tho' the Father and the Son are two distinct persons, yet since the Son is of and from the Father, as the fountain of the Deity, and intimately united with him, I conceive, in this sense he may be said to be one God vwith the Father.' This vwould not be accepted; and so they said they were for withdrawing from us, but were for parting amicably. I told them, They knew I had several times declar'd, that in case they could heal the breach, and continue to hold communion with one another, I should be very glad to be laid aside, if that would be a means to make peace; and that I continued in the same mind still. And I said to them; 'Gentlemen, you see I cannot do what you desire; Is there any thing

‘ thing I can do beside that will be of service to the peace of the Church? But had no answer. There were several of them that were much more moderate than the rest, and would have been glad if counsels of peace had been followed. And when we were got up to go away, I said to one who saw was troubled; ‘ Sir, I put it to you; Do you believe that the Gentlemen who drew this paper, did it with a design to heal? He would not say so; but answered, He believ’d they did it with a design for the glory of God. He desir’d us then not to depart, but let them withdraw and consult. We staid some time, and then one of them return’d, and brought us this civil answer, (tho’ some of them declare they knew not of it) That if we had no more to say to the Gentlemen, they had no more to say to us. And so we parted.

THE next day, which was *Friday*, three of the four proprietors of the meeting-house where Mr. *H.* and I used to preach, went, in their own and the fourth’s name, and took up the keys of the House. They sent us no message, nor did we know their design. On *Saturday* morning, I went to one of them, to know what they design’d, since I must study if I were to preach. His answer was, that I need not study, but might preach an old sermon: they took up the keys to assert their power, the house being theirs, and they would secure it, it being most convenient for his family. It being moved, that the people ought to determine the matter; he said, there might be a majority made perhaps by the small payers, and they were resolved upon having the place and ministers they liked, let the majority be ever so much against them; for they were able themselves to maintain them. However, he said, the proprietors would consult, and I should have an answer. Some hours afterwards, in the afternoon, I had an answer, That Mr. *Hallet* and I might preach at the little-meeting, and Mr. *Wubbers*, who had now offer’d them farther to subscribe the *Nicene Creed*, might preach at that near the *Bow*.

LET the world now judge. The house was built at the common charge; the Gentlemen were made proprietors only for form sake, the law making it necessary

sary the property should be vested in some persons; and the greater the confidence was that was placed in them, the more intolerable was their oppression when they betray'd their trust. 'Tis plain the people design'd the house for their own use in the worship of God, and that it should be at their disposal. This was virtually own'd by them, as often as they left the people to the choice of a minister. If they who were dissatisfied had withdrawn from us, and gone where they liked better; or if they had attempted to eject us by the votes of the people, we are too much friends to liberty to have troubled the world with such a publick complaint: But if these proprietors may rightfully shut the doors against whom the people chuse, or (which is all one) may make themselves the absolute judges whom to admit, or whom to exclude, I can't see why the people should ever more be concern'd in any choice at all. These Gentlemen have by this means the perpetual advowson of the living; and if the people will bear such an insult upon their liberty and just right; there's an end of one principle the Dissenters have always pretended to hold. I think it becomes them, as ever they will shew themselves friends to liberty, to protest against such unjust and oppressive methods. I shall always suspect a cause which the zealots can find in their hearts to support by such injustice.

ON Monday the 9th was publish'd a pamphlet, intitled, *Arius detected and confuted, &c.* 'Twas design'd to come out a little sooner; but 'twas time enough to shew the spirit of the man. 'Tis indeed a pamphlet written with as much vveakness and bitterness as can be suppos'd. The whole design is to expose us to hatred and scorn; charging us vvith things we do not own, as that Christ is a creature, &c. confidently asserting vve hold so, tho' we deny it; reviling us as *Arians*, tho' we disown the peculiar Opinion of *Arius*. I suppose some notice will be taken of it for the sake of the common people; as to men of sense, we know they cannot but despise it. As to ourselves, we have over and over declar'd, that vve are intirely satisfied in all that the scripture asserts concerning Christ, and ready to subscribe to any words
taken

from thence ; particularly we both of us testified, that we believe that text, *Rom. ix. 5. Who is over all, God blessed forever*, belongs to him.

ON *Tuesday*, upon an application made to the proprietors of the other meeting-houses, all of them that were in Town had a meeting together, wherein, without consulting the people, they determin'd we should have neither of the houses to worship God in. This put us to great streights, and with much difficulty vve procur'd a place against the Lord's-day, as convenient as vve could ; hoping shortly that we shall build a commodious one for the purpose. Nor can any wonder, that we had rather bear vwith some inconveniencies than give up our liberty.

I dare almost engage to gratify these Gentlemen in vvhatever they shall ask, if they can procure any men of reputation for sense and honesty that shall approve of what they have done. I with any of the seven advisers vould speak plainly vvhats they think of the method in vvhich vve vvere ejected. If they can venture to justify the course taken, they vvill very much confirm me in the notion I have already form'd of them ; and if they do not, they leave their friends in the lurch. But I think such ministers as either have already, or design to appear in our pulpit, must look upon themselves bound to vindicate what has been done, or else they must be inexcusable in invading what belongs to us, 'till we are justly dispossess'd of it. And I leave it now upon the consciences of the Dissenters in *Exon*, whether they think they can be innocent, if they fall in with, and abet, these Gentlemen in their violence. Whether their notions are true or false, I consider not at present : if they are ever so true, yet that will not justify what has been done ; for the righteous judge of the world will never approve of mens doing *evil* that good may come of it.

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